



Global Intelligence Review

February 17, 2025
Edition 32



GLOBAL

Global corruption increased across both developed and developing nations in 2024, underlining increased risk environment for transnational businesses. On

11 February, Transparency International released its 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index, which highlighted a significant rise in corruption; 47 nations have their lowest score since 2012. Several developed nations, including the US, France, Australia, Germany, Japan, and Switzerland have all dropped in rank – some hitting record lows. The report highlighted how the increasing embezzlement of public funds, lack of transparency, and challenges to ethics norms in governmental institutions correlate with the recent surge of corruption. Corruption remains especially prevalent in nations with authoritarian, or criminal, political regimes where firms are often asked to offer gifts to public officials directly – or through third parties – in order to receive permits, government contracts, or permission for travel to certain areas. This, in turn, increases the global risk environment for businesses and travelers in terms of arbitrary detention and legal compliance across developed and undeveloped nations.



AMER

Costa Rica: Persistent deterioration of security environment from rising crime will heighten risks for businesses and travelers over the long term. Over the past decade, the operations of criminal drug trafficking organizations have experienced a slow but steady uptick within this previously regarded safe haven country. A significant surge in illicit activity, recorded during the pandemic, has continued to grow. The number of gangs has increased – currently standing at approximately 340 – and expanded their presence from traditional coastal provinces like Limón and Puntarenas into major urban centers such as San Jose and Alajuela. Costa Rica has long been a transit point for drug trafficking. However, the spike in global cocaine production has led to its development as a logistical hub for criminal activities. The homicide rate for 2024 made it the second most violent year in Costa Rican history – although notably most murders were directed at rival gang members and not civilians. Due to the lack of a standing military in Costa Rica, the Fuerza Publica (the national police force) is the primary line of defense against these heavily armed groups, which they have been struggling to effectively combat and dismantle. Businesses face heightened risks of extortion, theft, and operational disruption, while travelers confront the increased risk of being the victim of incidental violence or theft. Travelers should remain informed of higher risk areas through official travel advisories and monitor local media.

Colombia: Resignation of Defense Minister highlights growing fallout from escalating violence of the National Liberation Army (ELN) in the Choco and Catatumbo regions. On 11 February, Defense Minister Ivan Velasquez resigned amid an escalating conflict in the north-east Choco region, where the National



Liberation Army (ELN) is battling the Clan del Golfo over control of drug routes along the Rio San Juan. Since the destabilization of the security environment in the Catatumbo region in January, concerns over the widening of the conflict are manifesting. A key factor in the ELN's growing strength is its presence in Venezuela, where the group has extensive operations – reportedly within at least 12 of Venezuela's 23 states. The Venezuelan government has been accused of not only tolerating the ELN's activities but actively supporting them. According to reports, there are joint operations between Venezuelan military forces and ELN fighters against rival regional armed groups. By allowing the ELN to use its territory as a safe haven, Venezuela has made it more difficult for Colombian authorities to counter the recent increase in violence within their borders. This dynamic has deepened tensions between Colombia and Venezuela, undermining regional security and complicating efforts to combat organized crime and insurgency along the shared border. Travelers should defer all travel to the Choco and Catatumbo regions and stay updated on security risks.

Mexico: US President Donald Trump's Executive Order designating cartels as foreign terrorist organizations may create heightened compliance risks for businesses. On 20 January, United States President Donald Trump issued Executive Order 14157, directing the US government to designate certain drug cartels and transnational crime gangs as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) or Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs). While the executive order does not explicitly limit its scope to Mexican cartels, it has been implied that they are the primary target. According to US officials, the groups expected to be designated under this order include the Sinaloa Cartel, Jalisco New Generation Cartel, Northeast Cartel, Gulf Cartel, Michoacan Family, and the United Cartels. This action aims to enhance legal



enforcement tools against these groups, allowing for criminal prosecution under anti-terrorism laws, including penalties for individuals and entities providing material support. The designation risks complicating U.S.-Mexico cooperation in anti-drug trafficking, as Mexico has historically resisted labelling cartels as terrorist groups to avoid external interference in domestic security matters. The shift also increases legal liabilities for businesses operating in cartel-affected regions, as transactions or extortion payments linked to designated groups could be prosecuted under US law as providing material support to a terrorist organization. Additionally, financial institutions, logistics companies, and supply chains operating in Mexico and Latin America may face heightened compliance burdens, requiring enhanced due diligence to avoid unintentional violations of counterterrorism financing laws. Businesses operating in, or dealing with regions affected by cartel activity, should strengthen their compliance measures and implement robust risk assessment protocols to avoid inadvertent violations of US counterterrorism financing laws.

United States: Expect disruption and exercise caution over the coming days amid severe weather warnings across the Mid-Atlantic, Mountain West and New England regions. On 16 February, 27 states issued winter weather and storm warnings that will persist until 21 February. Snow fall is expected to range between 6 inches to 2 feet in some states, depending on the area. This, combined with heavy winds, could lead to power outages, transport disruptions, low visibility, and hazardous road conditions. In Kentucky state, a state of emergency is in effect since 15 February as river water levels reached a historic high with winter storms bringing rain and snow over the weekend. At least 9 people were killed in weather related incidents, with the death toll expected to rise as most of the state remains under flood warnings. Meanwhile, the severe weather has led to numerous road closures across Kentucky, primarily affecting secondary and local roads, many key roads have



been impacted with temporary closures of certain sections, such as [Interstate 64](#) that is experiencing lane restrictions near Louisville, [Interstate 75](#) in central Kentucky, [U.S. Route 23](#) particularly in northeastern Kentucky, [U.S. Route 60](#) near river crossings, and [Kentucky Route 15](#) notably around the Jackson area. Travelers should anticipate flight cancellations or delays and expect transportation disruption due to snowfall and other hazardous conditions.



EMEA

Germany: Vehicle ramming attack in Munich highlights growing popularity as a modus operandi for violent acts. On February 13, an Afghan-asylum seeker drove a car into a crowd participating in a service workers labor union demonstration, injuring 36 people and killing two. The assailant's vehicle maneuvered around a police car following the demonstration and accelerated to plow into the back of the group. Authorities have reported that the perpetrator allegedly choose this target at random. This incident follows closely behind the widespread anti-AfD (Alternative for Germany) protests that took place in Munich over the past weekend and is considered by many to be a symptom of the elevated socio-political tensions. The act also fits into the recent accelerating trend of attacks by Asian or Middle Eastern immigrants motivated by a combination of frustration with the immigration system, feelings of alienation, and religious extremism. Additionally, the attack is emblematic of the increased use of vehicle ramming's globally – noting the recent New Orleans (US) attack and the attack on a Christmas Market in Magdeburg (Germany) – as the preferred modus operandi of those galvanized into committing violent acts for a variety of reasons. A vehicle does not require specialized training to operate and has the capacity to inflict harm against a large group. Travelers are advised to heighten situational awareness – taking note of suspicious vehicles or actors – when attending, or in the proximity of public gatherings, especially those controversial in nature.

Turkey: Arrest of opposition figures reflects authoritarian tendencies of President Erdogan's regime to retain political dominance. On 11 February, Turkish authorities detained ten Republican People's Party (CHP) opposition figures in Istanbul, including deputy mayors from Kartal and Atasehir municipalities, citing alleged ties to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which Turkey considers a terrorist



group. This followed the replacement of the elected People's Equality and Democracy Party (DEM) mayor of Siirt on 29 January, which was the eighth DEM mayor ousted from office on alleged links to the PKK and replaced with state appointees, since 31 March 2024 elections. The arrests highlight a broader strategic effort by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's administration use of legal and administrative measures to solidify the political dominance of his Justice and Development Party (AKP), which has seen its popularity weaken in recent years.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC): M23 captures Bukavu, underscoring their continued momentum on the battlefield and expanding territorial control. On 16 February, the Rwanda-backed M23 rebel group entered the regional capital of South Kivu province, Bukavu, and were met with no resistance, suggesting regional popularity. Bukavu sits on the border with Rwanda and is an important transit point for the mineral trade. This marks another territorial victory in the recent unprecedented offensive, which resulted in the capture of Goma, the regional capital of North Kivu province, nearly three weeks ago. As M23 continues to capitalize on their momentum and incorporate more territory under their control, the risk of inciting a wider regional conflict involving Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, and other regional states remains elevated. Whether M23 will seek to expand their territory beyond the mineral rich north-east region of the country and advance westward remains to be seen. However, it is likely that, despite the group's rhetoric, they will seek to entrench and fortify themselves within this profitable region rather than expend resources on a prolonged westward offensive. Efforts to engage the DRC, M23, Rwanda, and Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) in a dialogue to halt hostilities have failed to this point. Travelers should reconsider all non-essential travel to the DRC and monitor developments in the conflict closely for signs of an impending wider regional conflict.



Uganda: Monitor resurgence in Ebola outbreak and take necessary health precautions. On 30 January, the Ministry of Health announced the spread of a new Sudan-strain of Ebola (SVD) circulating in the capital Kampala. There have been nine confirmed cases so far. Communication from official government entities has been sporadic causing confusion over the extent of the outbreak and the current containment and treatment plans in place. There is no vaccine for this strain of Ebola, making prevention a priority and treatment intensive and difficult. Travelers are advised to follow all CDC and WHO hygiene guidelines for staying safe if traveling to Kampala.

Germany: Mass protests signal heightened tensions in run up to national elections that increase the risk of radicalizing individuals to commit violent acts. On 8 February, nearly 200,000 people rallied in Munich against the projected electoral gains of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party in national elections set for 23 February. The AfD is currently polling in second place. Protests in cities across Germany in recent days have similarly attracted robust attendance. Meanwhile, the conservative Christian Democrat Party proposed tough new migration codes that received the AfD's backing. Thus, with less than a week until the national elections, mass protests are liable to continue – with an increased potential for clashes with counter-demonstrators and police. Additionally, this atmosphere heightens the risk of radicalizing individuals – from the entire span of the political spectrum – to engage in targeted violence such as stabbings, shootings, or vehicle ramming. Travelers should remain abreast of all planned protests, avoid large crowds, and exercise caution in the lead up to elections, and in the aftermath.



Sweden: Arrest of suspected Islamist extremist underscores heightened inter-communal tensions and elevated risk of mass casualty events. On 11 February, Swedish police apprehended a suspect in Stockholm on suspicions that he was planning a terrorist attack motivated by jihadist ideologies. Recent inflammatory events have contributed to increased concern over terrorism. These include the murder of a prominent anti-Islam actor on 30 January – days before his trial over hate incitement charges, resulting from burning the Quran, was set to commence – and the subsequent accusation on 3 February against a Stockholm Mosque allegedly being co-opted by Iran for covert intelligence gathering. Since 2023, Sweden's terrorist threat rating has been elevated to its second highest level due to highly publicized Quran burnings that outraged Muslims globally and inspired a bevy of jihadist threats. The heightened tensions within the social fabric of Sweden suggest an elevated risk for possible terrorist attacks – by isolated individuals or on the behalf of organized militant groups – in addition to potential civil unrest and unruly protests over the upcoming weeks.

The Balkans: Anti-corruption and anti-government protests continue to spread, fueling concerns of greater civil unrest and government crackdowns. On 10 February, students in Bosnia-Herzegovina gathered to protest corruption that they allege led to the deaths of 29 people in October 2024 at an illegal quarry due to a landslide. The students have publicly declared that they are taking inspiration from the ongoing massive anti-corruption protests in Serbia, which have shaken the establishment and generated paralyzing delays. In Montenegro, students have also been actively engaging in protests taking aim at corruption, which they argue stymied efficient government response to two separate mass shootings in the same area



within 3 years. Demonstrators are calling for regime change as well as improved practices, evoking the atmosphere of the color revolutions that occurred within Eastern Europe during the early 2000's – which is a highly threatening posture from the perspective of the political regimes entrenched throughout the Balkans. The possibility for greater insecurity has significantly increased due to the risk of violent intervention from law enforcement. Travelers should remain abreast of planned or ongoing protests and avoid them due to security concerns.

Lebanon: Expect disruption and avoid protests over the coming days in Beirut linked to heightened tension between Hezbollah and the government. On 13 February, the government denied a flight from Iran to land in Beirut over concern it was carrying funds for Hezbollah. In turn, this prompted large scale protests by Hezbollah supporters who rallied near the Rafic Hariri International Airport. The protesters clashed with the Lebanese Army who deployed and attempted to disperse the protesters with tear gas. On 14 February, protestors attacked a UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) convoy that was heading to the airport, burning three vehicles and injuring the outgoing deputy commander and other officers. Further demonstrations and subsequent clashes are liable to take place amid heightened tension with the government, which has minimized Hezbollah's role in the government and reports that the government may obstruct the funeral of former Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah on 23 February.



APAC

Malaysia: Economy projected to continue to grow in 2025 as regional ties strengthen economic position. In 2024, Malaysia's economy grew by 5.1%, up from 2.6% in 2023, driven by strong domestic demand, foreign direct investment, and household spending. Growth is predicted at 4.5%-5.5% in 2025, with inflation expected to remain stable. This growth can be attributed to Malaysia's deepening economic ties with Singapore, particularly through the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone, which aims to strengthen regional economic resilience amid escalating US-China tensions. This strategic positioning allows Malaysia to attract foreign investment while balancing its economic engagement with both China and Western markets, reducing its vulnerability to external geopolitical pressures.

Sri Lanka: Nationwide power outage highlights the country's fragile energy infrastructure, posing a persistent risk to operational disruptions. On 9 February, nationwide power outages took place after a monkey reportedly caused damage to a transformer. This single point of failure led to a six-hour blackout, exposing the lack of resilience within the grid, which subsequently saw power cuts persist several days after. Sri Lanka has persistently struggled with power supply issues in the past, often due to financial difficulties and dependence on imported fuel. Without investment to modernize the grid, similar failures are likely to occur again, whether from technical faults, cyberattacks, severe weather or other disruptions. The risks go beyond daily inconveniences, as unreliable electricity makes the country less attractive for foreign direct investment, disrupts business operations, and weakens trust in government services.